

Proceedings of the 16th UniServe Science Annual Conference, 2010

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL OUTREACH PROGRAM

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KEYWORDS: science outreach, universities working with schools, recruiting science students

ABSTRACT

The School of Physics at the University of Sydney has an extensive and long-running outreach program. Here we describe three examples of best practice in terms of business model, content design and innovation. Three-hour syllabus-based workshops for year 12 students:

“Kickstart” consists of hands-on workshops based around the NSW Higher School Certificate Physics syllabus. Nearly 2000 students per year participate, attracted by complex experiments from the syllabus (which actually work!) The University benefits as well as the students: 10 – 15% of first year physics students cite Kickstart as the major reason they chose Physics at the University of Sydney.

An innovative meet and greet format: This format facilitates discussions between academics and participants by providing each academic with a poster with a question that participants can pose to them. The result has been startlingly successful for audiences of both high-school teachers and high-school students, with all participants engaging in unstructured and self-directed discussions with academics.

Shows for lower high school students: The “Flying Freezing Floating Physics” show addresses the high attrition rate from science in the lower high school years, with a summary of the content of the senior Physics syllabus. Colour and excitement come from the use of charismatic experiments and multimedia, as well as career info and interviews.

Proceedings of the 16th UniServe Science Annual Conference, University of Sydney, Sept 29th to Oct 1st, 2010, page122, ISBN number 978-0-9808597-1-3